

VZCZCXRO8133  
OO RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR  
DE RUEHRH #0928 1961551  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 151551Z JUL 09  
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1198  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0143  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 0234

UNCLAS RIYADH 000928

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, DRL/NESCA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: MOJ OFFERS MORE DETAILS ON SAUDI TERROR TRIALS

REF: RIYADH 921

#### SUMMARY

-----

¶1. (U) In a July 13 press conference, a Saudi Justice Ministry spokesperson confirmed that additional terror trials were underway, without specifying numbers. Of the recent 330 verdicts, 323 were found guilty, while 7 were acquitted; 289 of the defendants were Saudi. The spokesperson also disclosed that 42 of the defendants judged "hard core" would be held beyond their terms unless they repented before a judge. End Summary.

#### ADDITIONAL DETAILS ABOUT TERROR CONVICTIONS

-----

¶2. (U) The Ministry of Justice gave a second press conference on July 13 offering additional details on the recent terror trial convictions (Ref A). The Ministry's spokesperson, Dr. Abdullah bin Hamad al-Saadan, confirmed that additional terror trials were still underway and that all rulings were preliminary and subject to appeal within 30 days. Of the 330 terror suspects tried, seven were acquitted while 323 were convicted. Al-Saadan also said 289 of the defendants were Saudi and 41 were non-Saudi, though he did not specify the nationalities of the non-Saudis.

#### SENTENCING DETAILS

-----

¶3. (U) Prison sentences ranged from a few months to 30 years with 13 of the convicted sentenced to more than 20 years. However, al-Saadan noted that 42 of the most "hard core" Al-Qaeda militants sentenced to prison would not be released unless they repent their crimes before a judge following the end of their prison term. Fifteen of those convicted will pay financial fines in addition to their prison sentence while another 15 will be subjected to a travel ban, remaining in a Saudi city of their choice, upon completion of their prison sentence. Al-Saadan denied any knowledge of women being among those convicted, and chose not to disclose whether religious leaders and intellectuals were among those convicted, citing the "time constraints" of the press conference.

#### DUE PROCESS QUESTIONS

-----

¶4. (U) In response to concerns expressed by Saudi and international human rights activists, al-Saadan sought to assure the public that the trials were fair and just by giving an overview of the legal procedures implemented during

the trials. He noted that some of the accused sought and were given legal assistance while others opted to defend themselves. Additionally, he pointed out that 179 of the defendants were content with the rulings issued against them (Note: President of the quasi non-governmental organization, National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), Mufleh al-Qahtani stated that NSHR received complaints from 400 Saudis charged in terrorism-related cases. End Note).

#### COMMENT

-----

¶5. (SBU) The Ministry still has not released information identifying individual defendants or linking them to specific incidents. The requirement that the 42 "hard core" defendants "repent" means that they could potentially serve life sentences, and also demonstrates the plasticity of the Saudi judicial system. Al-Saadon's statement that 179 defendants are "content" with the verdicts against them seems intended to reinforce the credibility of the judicial process in the eyes of the public, but also represents an expression of the government's policy of portraying most extremists as misguided deviants rather than criminals.  
ERDMAN